

will help you with all arrangements for the funeral. I shall be present at it myself."

"Indeed, ma'am, you are not able for it; you don't know how ill you look."

"It will not hurt me," she still repeated; and quietly, though with a feeble step, she went into the carriage, and drove through the streets as if all were unreal around her, and the people whom she saw but moving shadows in a dream.

That same day, as Ernestine expected, a packet was brought to her from Hugh Lingard. It contained her letters, and a few little things she had given him, all arranged with a degree of tender care which touched her very much, and there was a note which contained only these words:

"I know that I must never look upon your face again. I know that my presence would henceforth be utterly unsupportable to you; nor could I now myself endure to link my guilty life with yours, so innocent and holy. Ernestine, you will believe me that I never for one moment guessed the truth, or dreamt of the horrible vengeance that was pursuing me, while you, in your guileless charity, were tracking out the unhappy girl who, best in all the world, could teach you what I was. You always spoke of Annie Brook, and I knew only Rosie Brown. But I did know, from the first moment that your intense desire to save her revealed to me the depths of your pure soul, that I was totally unfit to be your life's companion, that you would have shrunk from me with horror had you known my previous history, and that I was in truth cruelly deceiving you in suffering you to bind yourself to such a one as I am. The honorable course would have been to have given you up, even if I could not have brought myself to tell you the hateful cause of so dreadful a necessity; but, Ernestine, my one, my only love, you were dearer to me than words can ever tell, the very light of my life. I could not part with you; rather, every word you said, which showed how mistaken you were in your opinion of me, made me long to hasten the time when no such discovery as this could have torn you from me, though it might have broken your heart. But your God has taken care of you. My own deeds have risen up between us, and thrust us asunder for ever. I acknowledge the retribution to be just. My only love, farewell!

"HUGH LINGARD"

A postscript merely stated that by the time Ernestine received this letter he would have left England. And so terminated her life's bright dream, in a darkness which had no ray of light, save in the hope that by the wreck of her own mortal happiness she had secured eternal peace for Annie Brook.

For the next few days Ernestine moved about at her usual occupations, calm and still, speaking very little, and seeming to hear and see nothing of what was passing round her. She told Lady Beaufort quietly that the engagement between herself and Hugh Lingard was broken off by mutual consent, and bore without a word the storm of indignant and astonished remarks with which the various members of the family met her announcement; still less did she heed the varying reports as to the cause of the rupture which were circulated in society. In her late experience she had gone far above and beyond all that the world could do, either for or against her. But her physical strength was not proof against the shock she had undergone, and the long mental strain which had preceded it. She came home from Annie Brook's funeral chilled and shivering, though it was a warm summer day. In the night fever came on, and for some weeks she was too ill to be conscious of anything that had befallen her, or was yet to come.

In the long hours of convalescence, however, all the

past came back upon her, with the deep lessons it had to teach as to the true use and meaning of the life which, for so brief a time, is entrusted to each one of us, to make it in its fruits an eternal blessing or a curse.

Slowly she turned her wearied eyes to the future that might yet stretch out before her many years, and forced herself to consider how she meant to spend it. It was now about the time when her marriage would have been over, and Lady Beaufort had always intended after that event to take her two daughters to spend the winter in Rome; and she still adhered to her plan, though she would have been quite willing to let her niece accompany her. This, however, was what Ernestine felt she could not do. She knew that if she went with her aunt and cousins she would have to enter on a round of gaieties, for which the events of the last few months had totally unfitted her; and, besides, she felt she had arrived at a turning-point in her life, which had changed the aspect of the whole world, and her own position in it altogether. The natural happiness to which a woman looks in the ties of wife and mother could never now be hers. Hugh Lingard had alone possessed her love, and she knew that she could love none other while existence lasted. The life of mere society and amusement had always failed to satisfy her, and now the very thought of it was utter weariness to her; for her recent experiences had opened up to her a glimpse of the vast universe of sin and sorrow round her, and she longed with all her heart to make her life of some use to those who so sorely needed help, feeling that it would be only too short for all she should like to do for others in her course through the world. She thought of what she had seen in the gaol and the workhouse, and of the terrible necessities of that unhappy class to which Lois and Annie had belonged; and it seemed to her as if her difficulty lay only in a choice among so many who needed all that she or any one could do for them. She had a sufficient income to live independently in any way she pleased; but, while she was revolving many different plans in her mind, she found the whole matter suddenly taken out of her hands, and a claim of so urgent a nature made upon her that she could have no hesitation in giving up all else to it.

Tidings arrived from India of a terrible accident which had befallen Colonel Courtenay and his wife.

The very day after their arrival at Calcutta, he had been driving her out in an open phaeton, with a pair of fiery horses, little used to harness. Something had frightened them at the top of a steep ascent. They had run off at a tremendous pace, and had dashed the carriage against a stone wall at the bottom. It had been smashed to pieces, and both Colonel and Mrs. Courtenay were thrown out to a considerable distance. When persons came to their assistance, it was found that the young and beautiful Mrs. Courtenay was quite dead; she had fallen with great violence on a heap of stones, in such a manner as to cause instant death, while her husband had received a blow on the head which rendered him completely insensible. He had after a time regained consciousness; but there had been some fatal injury to the brain, and though his life was in no danger, he had subsided into a state of hopeless imbecility. Of course, all that his friends in India could do for him was to send him home at once to England, under the care of a doctor; and at the time when the letter reached Ernestine, her brother might be expected to arrive any day.

To be continued.

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It is the most reasonable thing in the world to believe that God, being what He is, He will do as He promised to do.

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